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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a strategy that was developed to help elementary school students to become more interested, involved, and accepted in school. The strategy involved a pen pal project in which students wrote to other students at an elementary school who were in other classes and at different grade levels. The idea was presented as a fun activity, and teachers also were able to incorporate critical thinking skills into the letter writing project. The project fit very easily into the school curriculum. The results of the project showed an increase in students' positive attitudes toward school, classmates, friends, and teachers. Sixty-eight percent of the students surveyed reported that the writing project made a difference in their perceptions of the school. Ninety percent enjoyed becoming acquainted with another person not in the same classroom. Appendices include pre and post implementation student climate surveys, pre and post implementation teacher climate surveys, and a letter of intent to parents. (DB)

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BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

by

Shirley A. Garrett

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A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for Advancement of Education of Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

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The country has a mobile population which has not encouraged interest, involvement or acceptance for students in the school setting. In the best interest of children, helping them gain acceptance, become interested in and decide to be involved in school would be most beneficial. The strategy used to encourage students increased self-esteem and a feeling of belonging was accomplished by a Pen Pal Project. Students wrote to other students at an elementary school who were in other classes and on different grade levels. The idea was presented as a fun activity but teachers were also able to incorporate critical thinking skills into the letter writing project. The project fit very easily into the school curriculum.

The results of the project showed a positive increase in student attitudes toward school, classmates, friends and teachers. Sixty-eight percent of the students surveyed reported the writing project made a difference in the perceptions of the school. Ninety percent enjoyed becoming acquainted with another person not in the same classroom. The project results were shared with the school faculty, administration and affiliations of the writer. Appendices include pre and post implementation student climate surveys, pre and post implementation teacher climate surveys and a letter of intent to parents.

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

Background

The target setting for this practicum was an elementary school which was located in a large central Florida school district. The population of the school was approximately 800 students. One third of this student population was bused in from an area that was 20 miles south of the school. The result was a heterogeneous mix of students with various socio - economic backgrounds. White, Black, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban Americans were all represented. In the targeted school, Chapter One was offered. Chapter One, a federally funded program, was designed to assist children who were identified as at risk. Chapter One serviced schools based upon the number of free lunches for which each school qualified. The target school had 320 qualified students for free lunches and 52 qualified students for reduced price lunches. Parent professions covered a wide spectrum: waitresses, grocery store workers, nurses, lawyers and firemen were representative

of the employment backgrounds of the parent population. The Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.) had a membership of 214. Ten of those members were teachers from the target school.

The target school had a student population that began at age four with a pre-kindergarten class. There were six kindergarten classrooms, 14 primary and nine intermediate classes. Teacher:student ratios were 1:16 with one additional paraprofessional in the pre-kindergarten, 1:23 in the kindergarten through third grades and 1:28 in the fourth and fifth grades. In addition to the 30 regular classrooms, there was a pre-kindergarten, a kindergarten, a primary and an intermediate emotionally handicapped (EH) class. These were self-contained. The school also housed two specific learning disabilities (SLD) classes, two resource emotionally handicapped (EH) classes and one self-contained gifted class. Within the student population there were eight students that were retained in the present grade from the previous school year. During the first three months of the school year, 38 students transferred into the school and 45 transferred out of the school. This demonstrated the transient population

of the targeted school.

The writer was a kindergarten teacher with 17 years of experience in the teaching profession. The writer worked at the target school for the fifth consecutive year and was in the fifth year as the kindergarten team leader.

Because of zoning requirements, every two years children were reassigned to a new school. They left the zone of comfort and ventured out, unsure of what would be found. What was found were new teachers, new students, new classes, new schedules. Many rode the bus for the first time. The parents of these students led busy lives. They were not involved in the school as evidenced by the P.T.A. membership. These factors led to a decreasing sense of community feeling within the school.

Problem Statement

Patricia Schroeder, a congresswoman from Denver, Colorado, stated:

> We live in a time of transition, a demographic revolution that is altering the American work force as well as the American family. Sixty five percent of all mothers with children under 18 years of age work outside the home. There are more single parent families and because of our mobility, there is less extended family support to help us meet the demands of balancing work and family...but

everything has changed (1988, p.ii).

The diminishing sense of community in modern society has been a phenomenon that has been evident in nearly every aspect of daily living: newspapers, television, church attendance, schools, etc. Parents have been too busy making a living to become involved in the community or in the school. Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee (1989) cited parent involvement as a way to improve school climate. As parents have brought important insights and perspectives into the home-school relationship so have both student behavior and academic achievement improved. Students felt their parents were concerned about what was happening and the students and parents shared something in common. There was another bond between parent and child.

The Yale University Child Study Center stated a problem existed for minority students. The reality was that children from lower socio-economic families experienced more stress. A disproportionate number of these children were under-developed for a school experience. These children may have been functional in a non-school setting but dysfunctional in school. Educators were not trained and organizations had not

developed an operation at the local site to address this problem. There was a gap between the social and academic needs of the students and the services and training available at the local site to meet these needs.

Many communities have identified boundaries with signs announcing "neighborhood watch." This, has in itself, suggested there has been distrust among people in the community. It also has suggested that people do not really know neighbors and are suspicious of everyone. The need for a sense of community, a feeling of oneness has been strong.

At the target school, there were barriers that prevented children from feeling a sense of community. The school site had a transient population. In the first two months of the school year, 10 percent of the total school population had transferred in and out of the target school. Every two years, the zones changed for the children who would be coming to the target school. Parents and students never felt a sense of belonging. Lee Robins, a sociologist at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, worked with patients at a child guidance clinic. Robins found that adult sociopaths were antisocial before the age of 18. The more symptoms shown

as a child, the greater the expectation for a child to become an adult sociopath (Magid and McKelvey, 1987). Conger and Miller did a study on delinquent boys in Denver. The study found that by the third grade future delinquents were already poorly adapted. The boys seemed to have less regard for the rights and feelings of others (Magid and McKelvey, 1987). Children have a need to bond with teachers and classmates. Each one has a need to feel this school belongs to the student.

There were 14 buses that transported students to the target school. The children were taken out of neighborhoods and surroundings that were familiar and comfortable. These children then traveled 20 miles to the target school that was far from home. Many left for school so early that breakfast was not served at home. These children then went into the school to eat breakfast. Usually breakfast was finished after the tardy bell had already rung. Now these same students entered the classrooms, where the class day had already begun. Once again, these students felt left out. There was not a good feeling of being a part of a community.

The target school had several pull out programs that released children from class. These programs included

guidance, speech, SLD resource, Chapter One, gifted and EH resource. Granted, these programs were of benefit to children, but each one could also be a deterrent to bringing the students together in a feeling of community within the classroom. Each program ranged from 30 minutes to two hours out of the class. If any programs were scheduled back to back, the time spent out of the class at one time was increased. The students were not able to share the camaraderie with peers.

Teachers also ran on a very tight schedule. So much curriculum was thrust upon teachers. Each contended with the pull out programs of the students plus the normal art, music and physical education schedules. There was not enough time within the school day to set aside a portion of the day for children to talk and get to know each other. All of the above served to disrupt the continuity and the social school climate, which was needed to build a feeling of community within the school setting.

A pre-implementation survey was administered to students in grades kindergarten through five. The surveys were read to the kindergarten and first grade students (Appendix A:68). Results of the survey showed

that 83 percent of the children felt good about the school. Sixty-six percent felt it was easy to learn at the school. Eighty-nine percent recorded the teachers cared if they learned. Sixty-three percent liked to go to school each day. Seventy-four percent felt their teachers let them talk about their ideas. Sixty-three percent reported it was easy to talk with classmates. Seventy three percent found it easy to talk with friends. Eighty four percent felt teachers cared about students. Eighty two percent had someone to talk to at school about a problem. Seventy-six percent found it easy to make friends at school. Fifty-nine percent of those students surveyed reported the teacher was their favorite person to talk to at school. Fifty-six percent reported a classmate as a favorite person to talk to. Of those students surveyed, 33 percent were walkers to school, 37 percent rode in cars to school and 30 percent came on the bus (See Appendix A:68). Even though the results of the student surveys were higher than expected, the writer believed that 95 percent of the students surveyed should indicate a firm sense of belonging.

The teachers were also given a pre-implementation survey to discern feelings about the classroom

environment (Appendix B:70). Thirty-three percent saw an interest from families in the school. Seventy-seven percent believed students showed an interest in school. Eighty-three percent felt there was time available for students to interact. Seventy-eight percent believed students felt at ease communicating with one another. Eighty-eight percent felt they had time to include critical thinking skills. Eighty-three percent felt no uneasiness in the classroom. Seventy-two percent felt students enjoyed writing activities. Ninety-eight percent of the teachers surveyed thought students looked forward to coming to school each day. Eighty-nine percent believed children felt good about the school attended. Teachers expectations were high as evidenced by the survey results, however, there should be 95 percent of the teachers who felt the classroom atmosphere was one of open communication and easiness. A time to implement critical thinking skills should be increased by 50 percent.

Few efforts were made to systematically promote social uses of critical thinking and technology in the target school. No formal curriculum modifications were in place on a school-wide basis to promote social uses

of critical thinking and technology. Such a school-wide program should have been in place to help promote social consciousness and a sense of belonging among students. This would also reduce the barriers to school cohesiveness and community. The discrepancy was there was no formal school-wide attempt to build community where there should be. There was a need to develop a school-wide project that teachers (on a voluntary basis) could participate in to build a strong sense of school community.

Outcome Objectives

The country has had a mobile population. People have moved in and out of communities to follow job opportunities. Parents have been too busy to become involved in the community or the school. Students have not necessarily felt connected to the school each attends. A child's best interest has been served when in a school setting there has been a climate of acceptance. Children have needed a place where there was social as well as physical comfort.

The target group of 315 students who participated in the writer's project were volunteers. Nineteen classroom teachers volunteered to take part in the

project.

Following a period of 12 weeks, 95 percent of the 315 target kindergarten through fifth grade students should indicate a positive sense of school belonging as measured by 80 percent positive comments on a teacher created post-implementation school climate survey.

Following a period of 12 weeks, 95 percent of the 19 teachers should report that students have maintained or improved a positive sense of school belonging as measured by a teacher created post-implementation teacher climate survey.

Following a period of 12 weeks, 100 percent of the students should have participated in the formal school climate improvement project as measured by the number of letters written and accounted for by the classroom teachers.

During a period of 12 weeks, 80 percent of the 315 target students should have used the available word processing capabilities in the classrooms as measured by observing the number of students writing letters using the word processor which will be accounted for by the classroom teachers.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

School climate, as described by Ellis in his report to elementary school principals, was a difficult phenomenon to define or measure. It was easier to perceive. The indicators of school climate were both objective and subjective. Those schools thought of as reflecting a good climate had enthusiastic, hardworking students. The staff consisted of people who were cooperative and dedicated. There was mutual trust, respect and support between teachers and administrators. Those schools perceived as reflecting a poor climate showed the opposite qualities. Those differences were easy to understand. Ellis felt "there is a close connection between a school's climate and success in carrying out its mission" (1988, p.3). What was not clear was where each school was on the continuum between good and bad or how to bring about lasting change. Ellis believed that in order to assess a school's climate, the variables must be identified, which showed what the situation was and how it was to be measured.

Ellis identified several factors that were consistently associated with positive outcomes. Those included the importance of the physical attributes of a school; the characteristics of individuals in the school; the patterns or rules of operating and interacting in the school; and the factors that reflected the values, attitudes and belief systems of people within the school. The factors that most consistently correlated with good school climate were those that pertained to the rapport between teachers and administrators. Principals played a pivotal role in the climate of a school. Good communication between staff and administration that reflected trust, respect and care were important for a positive school climate.

Ellis further discussed the importance of parent and teacher perceptions in determining school climate and how to improve it. Ellis noted:

> (1) schools should be responsive to their client's preferences, (2) precise descriptions of school climate require multiple measures with convergent validation, (3) the principal's leadership is critical for effective schools, and (4) efforts to change schools need to be school-based and school-specific (Ellis, 1988, p.4).

Upon reviewing others' research Ellis (1988) concluded that schools with higher achievement scores in

reading and math were also strong in instructional leadership by the principal with a school-wide emphasis on basic skills. Parental involvement was also important coupled with an atmosphere of high expectations. A healthy school climate made a crucial difference among minority and low-income students.

Freiberg's Consistency Management (CM) was a program which used research from classroom management, instructional and school effectiveness, school climate and staff development to make practical application in the classroom and school. The five lowest ranked schools, on the state-mandated Texas Education Assessment of Minimal Skills (TEAMS), were chosen to participate in the program. The results showed that there were significant gains in the TEAMS test scores in the areas of mathematics, reading and writing after implementation of the Consistency Management Program. During the same three year period of time, those non-program schools that shared similar characteristics in the socio-economic status of students and student populations decreased by two percent on TEAM scores. Interestingly, the number of student disciplinary referrals declined. Five CM school principals and 19 teachers were interviewed to gain

insight into the issues faced by administrators, teachers and students. High praise for the CM program was reported by most of those interviewed. At least one aspect of the CM program had been implemented in target classrooms and schools. Those interviewed noted that the CM program encouraged sharing and collegiality among all staff. Interviewees also responded that the program "has direct and positive transfer to the classroom" (Freiberg 1989, p.374).

The goal of the Consistency Management program was to create a classroom environment that was warm and supportive. It was to be firm and orderly with effective interactive instruction. Those qualities depended upon the consistency of the teacher. Consistency Management plans were required to turn around at-risk schools through shared management values, rules, routines and reward and punishment systems of teachers, principals and students. Consistency Management emphasized preventing classroom problems rather than stopping problems once started.

Through workshops, teachers were provided training in the following areas: creating consistent classroom environments, improving questioning techniques to

increase higher-order thinking, developing cooperative learning groups and peer teaching and developing in-class math and reading centers. The teachers decided what workshops were needed to improve classroom techniques. In the CM program, the teachers learned to examine personal values pertaining to students' behavior and behavior management. The teachers then looked at the way values were communicated to students. Teachers were encouraged to show high expectations for each student's behavior and achievement. Through workshops, strategies were learned that promoted positive models for students. This prepared students for success, to achieve self-discipline and enjoy responsible freedom in the classrooms. Classroom freedom was one in which students and teachers shared and built responsibilities. There was a positive, focused climate where mutual respect existed between teachers and students. There was active participation by all.

An important aspect of the CM program was consistent communication between parents and teachers. This was done through different forms of written communication. Phone calls, festivals and programs were other ways teachers regularly communicated to parents informing them

of curriculum and school activities. Freiberg's (1989) CM program has shown clear signs of success in the five schools that were in the study. Order and student self-discipline improved, parent involvement increased, there was a more favorable, less stressful school climate, office discipline referrals were reduced and principals and teachers saw more clearly the direct relationship between consistency and effectiveness.

Orr and Klein (1991) believed that critical thinking was not simply a set of skills that could be taught by a defined program. There were styles of reasoning that were best suited to particular matters or contexts. Orr and Klein's (1991) Critical Spirit Project had as its purpose the instruction of critical thinking as a means of character education. Orr and Klein (1991) used the term "critical spirit" in place of "critical thinking." It was felt that the new term was more in line with the philosophy of developing thoughtful people. Orr and Klein (1991) described thoughtful people as those who:

> habitually avoid capricious analysis of situations, who exhibit a questioning orientation in various domains of life, and who are willing to examine situations creatively and flexibly (p.132).

If these precepts were to be believed, a deeper concept

of character education than that found in public schools must be developed. Character education required that students and teachers develop basic character traits such as a critical, questioning spirit; truthfulness; a sense of fairness; a willingness to take intellectual risks. The traits were not only morally correct, but the absence of these traits decreased effective teaching and positive learning. The critical spirit has been identified as one of the character traits that affects children and learning.

Orr and Klein (1991) felt that thinking was always about something and occurred in context. Thinking skills cannot be taught separately as an independent subject area, but rather in specific contexts. The teacher acted as the mentor or role model. Each context had its own standard of excellence so that critical reasoning could be observed and assessed. Orr and Klein (1991) believed acquisition was the process of acquiring knowledge by being exposed to models in a trial and error atmosphere. Learning was a conscious effort to gain knowledge. Critical thinking was most effective when knowledge was acquired by following a role model and being engaged in a meaningful activity. Orr and Klein (1991) believed

that students acquired critical reasoning habits more easily and effectively when in an environment where ideas were respected and students were encouraged to think for themselves and work on interesting problems.

The Critical Spirit Project was developed as a model that required teachers and principals to pay attention to the culture or climate in each classroom. Critical habits could flourish in schools where 1) students were encouraged to be intellectually curious; 2) where students worked on projects that they had interest in; 3) where students and teachers believed that ideas were respected and each could be a risk taker; 4) where expectations were high; 5) where the environment was stimulating; and 6) where there could be a spirit of playfulness or concentration on studies.

Orr and Klein (1991) asserted that children come from different backgrounds. When children come into the school setting, educators have endeavored to adapt children to the school's way of speaking, reasoning and thinking. It was important not to jeopardize students' ability to function in their own neighborhoods as teachers adapted each to a particular school.

Orr and Klein (1991) referred to ways of thinking,

speaking and acting as discourse. Teachers needed to be aware of the different discourses in the classrooms;

> Teaching is ultimately a task of helping students feel at home in foreign terrain-enticing them into different models of sophisticated academic behavior. This task requires an ability to communicate across discourse boundaries (Orr and Klein, 1991, p.141).

Montoya and Brown (1990) felt that a main goal of education and educational research was to define what conditions needed to exist in the classroom for effective learning to take place. Since the recent decline in achievement test scores, there has been re-emphasis on basic skills. Montoya and Brown (1990) said that school climate, which is defined "as the norms, beliefs, and attitudes reflected in the conditions, events and practices of a particular environment (p.2)", was one area where researchers were attempting to establish a relationship between school climate and student achievement. Montoya and Brown (1990) identified school climate as critical to the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, Montoya and Brown (1990) emphasized the positive relationship between learning and certain aspects of school climate.

In addition, they noted that school climate and

academic achievement have shown a correlation between a positive learning climate and improved student behavior, increased school attendance and higher levels of achievement. It was also noted that projects in schools that focused on school climate showed improvement in student behavior, perceptions of school, student interactions and achievement. There has also been a report that links a positive learning environment to increased student motivation.

Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee (1986) found through their study with 14 elementary schools that one of the most effective ways to improve the climate of a school was through parental involvement at all levels of school life. The socio-economic level of the parents was not relevant. Each parent brought important insights and perspectives into the home-school relationship. This improved student behavior and academic achievements.

There have been many approaches to parent involvement that have been implemented around the country. The Positive Parenting Program, used in Pasadena, California, has had positive results. The Parent In Touch Program in the Indianapolis Public Schools, which used a full time parent-teacher liaison,

has been very effective. The Norfolk Public Schools Parent Program had parent activity leaders in each school. These programs, since implementation, have had positive effects.

Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee (1986) researched the Parent Program developed by the School Development Program staff at Yale University and implemented in an inner city school system. This program had levels of interaction. In level one, all or most of the parents were involved in the total school activities. There was at least one planned activity, but generally, the schools had more. Those included a School Carnival, Grandparents Day, Spring Musical, Family Night, Children's Art Exhibit, Track and Field Event and Ice Cream Social. The second level of participation involved parents giving of their time, an average of 18 parents working 15 hours a week. The parents became involved in the media center, cafeteria, office, playground, fundraisers and material preparation activities. The third level allowed parents to participate in school government by serving on the School Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC met monthly to establish goals and objectives for the school and monitor the progress.

The results of this program showed an increase of positive change in the classroom climate, as viewed by students. Teachers and parents alike, felt the school climate improved due to the parental involvement.

The conclusion drawn by Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee (1986) suggested that parental involvement in schools was both desirable and beneficial. The climate of the school was enhanced, even for those schools in poorer neighborhoods. The more parents got involved in the planning and organizing of school activities, the bigger the contribution to enhanced school climate.

> Two contemporary publications - one from the National Commission for Excellence in Education (1983) and the other from the U.S. Department of Education (Kyle, 1985) - have identified a number of specific foci for educational reform. Because these and similar correlates of educational effectiveness and excellence - school boards, administrators and teaching staffs of the nations' schools have been investing considerable amounts of resources, time and attention to changing the ways teaching and learning occur (Schelkum et al., 1987, p.1).

Schelkum et al.(1987) believed the time had come for improved school and classroom climate. There needed to be increased teacher and student involvement in decision-making and a more positive teacher and student emphasis on expectations.

Enhancing Classroom Climate through Pupil Involvement and Problem Solving in People (PI/PSP) was a year-long social competency training program reported by Schelkum et al. (1987). This program had three major areas of intervention and research. They were: (1) Social competency training, done through curriculum that was structured and used interpersonal cognitive problem solving, (2) Organizational Development (OD), which was "systems intervention", carried out by structured organizational development training and consultative interventions and (3) Quality of Work Life/Quality circle (QWL/QC) employee involvement model. This paper partially evaluated this system.

Schelkum et al. (1987) reported a focused line of research and curriculum-building has been quietly building for 20 years. This research has been concentrating on activities that enhance cognitive social problem-solving activities. The major goal was to be able to measure these competencies, which have been identified as objectives of improved classroom climate, improved participation and involvement, appropriate behavior and enhanced productivity. The Quality of School Life for elementary schools (QSL-E) program served

as the organizational framework for the year-long PI/PSP program. The goal was to improve classroom climate and the way teachers and students interacted throughout the day.

The study was conducted in two mid-sized, urban communities. Sixteen classrooms were involved in this study. The report contrasted the social problem-solving abilities of the trained versus the untrained classrooms. The areas to be evaluated were: (1) concrete and empathic observations, (2) relevant prior thinking, (3) identifying relevant problems, (4) effective means/ends thinking and (5) reaching agreement on appropriate plans of action. Observed teacher and student behaviors relating to school climate were also noted.

The instructional phase of the study consisted of 21 lessons, which were taught in 15 minute segments. Each lesson averaged between two to four sessions. Teachers were encouraged to use real-life demonstrations. The problem-solving sessions were held from October to May. There were five units. Each lesson followed a structured problem-solving sequence. At the end of the 15 minute sessions, unfinished sections were summarized and were to be addressed at the next meeting of the PI Circle.

Teachers in the program had access to weekly Quality of School Life (QSL) staff. The non-program teachers had none. They were, however, provided with a stress management training workshop during the year. Non-program teachers were assured that the following year training would be available.

Results suggested that kindergarten through second grade needed increased time and frequency of lessons. Overall, the trained groups showed more and better sequential problem-solving behaviors. The groups in the program demonstrated a greater ability to produce more appropriate action plans. The trained groups focused more on effective problem-solving strategies. The untrained classes did not reach a consensus in problem-solving. The trained classes wasted less effort in problem-solving and felt more confident in making friends. The trained group was more likely to make appropriate action.

Teachers in the trained classrooms were continually surprised at the visdom, reasonableness and the ability to find appropriate solutions from the children. The teachers who had been most skeptical about empowering their students became more willing to delegate problem-

solving procedures to the children. This made the role of the teacher change from one of directive to one of participant.

There has been increased interest in early childhood education as a way to improve educational achievements of disadvantaged minority children. Stipek et al. (1991) suggested that pre-school education has positive long-term effects on academic achievement. There were, however, several points of view as to what the most effective approach to preschool education was. The DISTAR program that emphasized recitation and memorization was favored by those who saw an early introduction to basic skills using teacher-directed instruction as the most beneficial. Child development experts favored a child-centered approach, which emphasized child-initiated learning activities. The authors argued that all child development experts criticized the stressing of academic skills. Stipek et al. (1991) believed the emphasis on performance and external evaluation led to low self-confidence and cautiousness in older children. Those children who were not allowed to make choices or to be themselves undermined the intrinsic interest in school projects.

There were programs available, not only on either end of the educational spectrum, but anywhere in between. The attempt was to create an observation-based approach to early childhood programs that was set apart by instructional and social-climate variables. Stipek et al. (1991) wanted to identify the types of programs that were available and examine how these programs used the instructional practices to work together in the real world. The second purpose of this program was to examine the relationship between the type of educational program and the socio-economic status (SES) of the children served.

Stipek et al. (1991) made a few tentative hypotheses. First, experts tended to favor child-centered approaches. Second, didactic programs emphasized academic performance so they would favor more testing to determine entrance and promotion decisions and formal evaluations of academic performance. Didactic schools were expected to have more stringent promotion requirements.

Sixty-two preschool and kindergarten classrooms were observed. They were selected on the basis of reputation, conversations with directors, principals and teachers. A

good distribution in terms of curriculum, ethnicity, social class of the children served and the type of program either public or private were foremost in the selection process of the school. Over 70 percent of the children served in the 23 schools were considered poor. Thirty-five programs served mostly middle-class children and the remaining four programs served a heterogeneous population according to social class. Seventy percent of the students were predominantly White in 18 of the programs. There were African-American in eight programs, Latin in 15 and Asian in two. The remaining 19 programs served an ethnically mixed population.

The authors' interests were in the social-motivational efforts and academic achievement efforts of educational programs on young children. The observers made 27 judgments about each organized activity and 36 summary judgments were made at the end of the day. The author cited the rating scale of Harms and Clifford's, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and Hyson's, Inventory of Classroom Practices as measured criteria. The Harms and Clifford (ECERS) measure was used to assess the quality of early childhood education programs. It was shown to be a good predictor of child

outcomes. The Hyson scale included 20 items to check developmentally appropriate practices. Two sub-scores were used in the study. One measured the degree of developmentally appropriate and inappropriate instruction in the class. The second included six emotional climate items.

The observers for this study were mostly doctoral students. They spent one free day in each classroom. The programs that scored high on the teacher warmth sub-scale had teachers who were nurturing, accepting, responsive to children. Programs that scored high on the positive control sub-scale had a positive approach to keeping students engaged in activities that were interesting, minimizing misbehavior and giving clear instructions. Ridicule, threats and punishment to motivate children were not included. Those programs that scored high on the academic emphasis sub-scale focused clearly on subject matter. The tasks were often closed-ended and were not practical or personally meaningful activities. The programs that scored high on the performance pressure sub-scale had teachers that were more likely to give negative evaluations and criticize, threaten and punish to motivate students. Tasks were emphasized over

enjoyment of learning. In programs that scored high on the evaluation stress sub-scale, outside rewards and evaluations were given more frequently. Social comparisons were emphasized. Those programs that rated higher in child initiative, teacher warmth and positive control had relatively low scores on academic emphasis, performance pressure and evaluation stress.

Private school programs were found to be more didactic than public schools. For-profit programs were found to be less child-centered. Teacher education or experience and adult-child ratio were not significant enough to be associated with a type of program. Comparisons were made between the 23 programs that were attended by mainly poor children and the 35 programs that were attended by mainly middle-class children. The poor programs tended to serve ethnic minorities. The middle-class programs included four which were predominately Black, one predominately Latins, one predominately Asian, 18 predominately White and 11 that were mixed with regard to the ethnicity of the children served.

The study found that preschool programs serving poor children tended to be more child-centered. Those programs that serviced middle-class children tended to be

more didactic. The study also found that middle-class preschoolers were serviced by private programs. Kindergarten programs were evenly divided between public and private. Programs servicing the poor had a lower adult/child ratio. The evaluation, retention and testing policies did not vary in either social class structure. Interestingly, it was found that middle-class children are held back from kindergarten in terms of age and poor children are more likely to be held back in kindergarten.

The authors found that when there was a strong emphasis on academic achievement and teacher-directed instruction, the positive social climate suffered. The authors also believed that an emphasis on basic skills should not preclude a positive classroom climate. None of the indicators of quality in the programs suggested that the quality of either type of program was less desirable than the other.

Comer et al. (1986) discussed the Yale Child Study Center School Development Program as a school improvement process. It strengthened students' academic and social skills in low income and mostly minority schools. This process used levels that applied to mental health knowledge, skills and sensitivities. The author

suggested there was evidence that this process prevented or reduced the number of children with emotional disorders. It taught students how to cope during early school years. The author also believed the program could improve education and reduce several social problems.

Comer et al. (1986) stated "The School Development Program (SDP) was one of the largest running public school-university cooperative improvement efforts in the country"(p.2). It has been based on education and mental health principles. Those principles applied to the classroom as well as larger organizational units. This program has brought about a high level of academic and social success for students.

The strategy for the program was based upon the nature of the problem of teaching and learning in inner-city schools. These schools were predominately Black and Hispanic. Families from lower socio-economic structures experienced more stress than families up the economic scale. As a result many of those children were functional in a non-school setting, but dysfunctional in a school environment. There was a gap between student needs and system conditions. This historically led to student, staff and parent under-achievement or failure.

This failure could have lead a student to a downward course in school and even life. The second phase concentrated on identifying the areas where high-risk children needed more prevention strategies. Problems of academic achievement and school adjustment could be reduced or even prevented if at an early period in a child's life and through a systems-level prevention effort, these problems were addressed.

The third phase of the plan began with a comprehensive intervention approach. The objectives were clearly communicated and stated: (1) basic social skills of inter-actional, situational or social environmental management skills were to be taught, (2) the social skills were to be integrated with the academic program and (3) all non-academic skills were to be integrated with the academic program. During this phase of the program, school personnel began to take over from the Child Study Center mental health team. Also during this phase, there was significant improvement in academic, social climate and staff development areas.

In the fourth phase, a Mental Health Fellowship Program for Educators was added. The purpose of this program was to train educators in the areas of child

development, mental health and intervention knowledge, skills and sensitivities. These educators, then, returned to their schools as change agents and applied their skills. During this phase, educators from other districts received training in the School Development Program. They became the change agents for their districts.

The SDP developed an intervention process. This approach addressed all aspects of the school's operation. Improving students' academic achievement was the overall goal. This was done by focusing on two lesser goals: (1) improving students' psychological adjustment and skills and (2) improving the school climate. The school climate referred to the attitudes and interactions of staff, students and parents.

The basis for the intervention process was a mental health team. It consisted of professionals from the Child Study Center. This team guided the project's organization, management and activities. Comer et al. (1986) stated:

> It applied knowledge, skill and sensitivity to facilitate the multiple human interactions which take place in school settings. It transmitted a relationship, child development consciousness to parents and staff, and as a result, a climate which facilitated teaching,

> learning and child growth development emerged (p.8-9).

The mental health team members worked together with the school to evaluate programs, address the issues of parent participation, staff development, academic achievement and behavior and psychological adjustment. This enabled the team members to act in a preventive rather than reactive way. School climate, parent, staff and student performance improved. This created an atmosphere of higher levels of confidence and expectation among all those involved. The trend was in an upward spiral of staff, parent and student performance.

Follow-up data from the schools that have implemented the SDP showed that students scored higher on standardized tests. There were improved self-concepts and better student behavior and attitudes. Comer et al. (1986) felt this last finding was important and indicative of the need for a mental health approach to school improvement.

The Governor's Education Review Committee (1984) for the state of Georgia developed and defined what was meant by quality basic education. This committee made recommendations for achieving a quality basic education. All of the necessary elements were prioritized and

delivered to the Governor.

The review committee recognized the fact that the process that was needed to bring about this change would never be finished. The committee, therefore, recommended a group of citizens be appointed to report on the progress of the process and further appoint a task force to develop a plan on teacher career ladder and leadership incentives.

The quality basic education the committee recommended consisted of 76 competencies. Sixty-eight of these competencies were required of all students. The competencies were divided into three subgroups; (1) compensation, standards and accountability for educators, (2) revised funding methods and additional operating costs, (3) major delivery methods. Legislative action either independently or coupled with the State Board of Education was needed to accomplish the major portion of the reforms.

One of the competencies listed by the Education Review Committee (1984) for a quality basic education was school climate. Many factors made up a school climate. The committee focused on school discipline and how it directly affects teachers and students. Extra-curricular

activities positively and negatively affected attitudes toward school. School leaders, parents, children and teachers were all affected by community involvement. Not only the school climate but relationships were affected by this involvement. Policies that recognized the teacher as the professional and the instructor fostered a good school climate. When a more participatory problem-solving process was used the school climate was enhanced.

Behling (1981) argued that the background of a family did not cause or keep children from instructional effectiveness. Behling believed that all children were educable and the behavior of the school was critical. The school determined the quality of that education. In the research reviewed by Behling no evidence was found to suggest that the family background mainly determined the quality of student performance and learning. Schools and particular classrooms have had a positive impact on students and learning.

An important factor in determining school effectiveness related to the values held by those who worked at the school. Student outcomes were found to be better in schools where teachers planned the curriculum

and a common set of beliefs was shared by all. When the staff determined desired behavior expectations, the staff also made sure those concepts were implemented. The climate of the school was an important factor in an effective school.

Behling (1981) reported that school climate was important to students. It affected the way the students accepted school policies. The school climate was affected in a positive way by the staff exhibiting positive attitudes toward students. Staff and students also shared activities, including out of school activities. Many students held positions of responsibility, which fostered a positive school climate.

Recent studies have concluded that the principal has been a key factor in school success. In schools where the philosophy from the principal said that students could learn, the staff also believed students could learn. The principal was important to an effective school by encouraging team building and problem solving.

Behling (1981) found that when the number of school days was increased by 10, the hours in a school day were extended to six and the average daily attendance was brought to 95 percent, the academic achievement was

increased. Students who attended preschool scored higher on achievement measures than those who did not. Children who attended preschool and were in an all-day kindergarten scored higher than those who did not.

School safety has always been a concern and a factor in school climate. Behling found that: (1) large schools had greater loss of property than small schools, (2) in a larger school students felt more distant from teachers, consequently students valued the teachers' opinions less and there was greater property loss for the school, (3) coordination between faculty and administration when enforcing order meant lower property loss and (4) schools with a strong desire for high grades tended to have less violence.

Glass and Smith (1979, as cited in Behling, 1981) stated there was a positive relationship between smaller class size and student achievement. Other areas affected by class size were pupils' attitudes and interests. Teaching practices and teacher morale also suffered. The Educational Research Service analyzed data and came to the conclusion that smaller class sizes did have a positive influence on student achievement in reading and math in the primary grades and for low achieving and

economically or socially disadvantaged students.

Brookover and Lezotte (1987, as cited in Behling, 1981) identified positive factors found in improving schools. Those factors were:

> 1. Teachers and administrators accepted and emphasized the mastery of the basic skills in reading and math.
>
> 2. School personnel were committed to bringing all children to minimum achievement.
>
> 3. Principals and teachers believed that all students could master the basic skills.
>
> 4. The staff accepted the concept of accountability to a greater degree than in the declining schools (Brookover and Lezotte, 1977, as cited in Behling, 1981, pp.9-10).

Teachers in effective classrooms used positive reinforcement on a consistent basis. Teachers had high expectations for students. A classroom climate that was high achieving, sociable, democratic and warm had students who responded favorably. Classrooms that stressed a positive climate also had fewer negative interactions among students.

Andringa and Fustin (1991) wrote about a school climate change project. The school principal, along with 44 teachers in a kindergarten through eighth grade building, completed a needs assessment. The effort was made in order to identify the greatest concerns of the

faculty. School climate factored out as being the greatest concern. School climate for this faculty was defined as:

> (a) a strong sense of academic mission, (b) high expectations conveyed to all students, (c) a strong sense of student identification/affiliation, (d) a high level of professional collegiality among staff and (e) ongoing recognition of personal academic excellence (Andringa and Fustin, 1991, p.233).

The faculty redefined school climate as :

> the atmosphere that permeates a school environment. This atmosphere stems from the relationships between administration, faculty, staff, students and the community (Andringa and Fustin, 1991, p.233).

An organizational change model was selected and presented to the effective schools committee. This committee was made up of four teachers and the principal. The committee changed the model in order to make it fit the character of the faculty as a whole and work within the district's guidelines. The teacher volunteers on the committee served as facilitators for the remaining teachers. Each group was asked to bring three concerns about the school climate to the first meeting. The major concerns were centered around 1) quality interaction between the school, parents and the community; and 2) the teachers with the administration and the teachers with

students.

It has been found that a checklist for making change at a school must be relevant to the intended school and match the values of that school. Provous' Discrepancy Evaluation Model combined with the discrepancy measurement format of Howard, Howell and Brainard and the expressed concerns of the teachers were sources drawn from to form the measuring instrument. A 43 item measurement instrument was then developed and presented to the faculty. The four administrative indicators to be addressed were:

1. Teachers have the opportunity to evaluate the performance of the principal.

2. The superintendent carries out the policies enunciated by the school board.

3. The superintendent models positive interaction with the principal, faculty and community.

4. Rules for visiting in the school are clearly posted and are followed by parents who visit (Andringa and Fustin, 1991, p.234).

Four points that would be addressed by the faculty were:

1. Students believe the school program is meaningful and relevant to their present and future needs.

2. Teachers feel that they have important input into school decisions.

3. The school supports parent growth.

Opportunities are provided to parents to be involved in learning activities.

4. The community supports the school's teaching program (Andringa and Fustin, 1991, p.234).

The faculty established a problem-solving team to help in the change process. This lightened the load of the principal and also increased the commitment of the teachers. This team used a decision-making process and developed objectives and implementation plans.

Half days were set aside for the faculty to meet, discuss and deal with problems. The principal was supportive of the teachers. The principal took part in the faculty meetings, visited small groups, served as liaison between the school board, teachers and community. Plans were implemented to change the areas of concern by the teachers. Over a two year period, the plans the teachers developed were carried out. The teachers had a positive attitude about the effort. There was increased communication among the faculty and between the faculty and staff. The strength of the project was having problems identified and then solved.

Solution Strategy

Andringa and Fustin (1991) reported that school

climate was the major concern for the faculty that was studied. Freiberg and others (1989) reported that school climate was related to school effectiveness. Behling stated in his research that the school determines the quality of education. Rutter (1979, as cited in Behling, 1981), emphasized the climate of a school as a very important factor in the effectiveness of the school. The Governor's Education Review Committee (1984) believed that school climate was a necessary part of quality basic education (QBE). It was one of the 76 QBE competencies.

School climate has affected children. The student population of the targeted school came from varied backgrounds. When these children came to school, each needed to know that individual needs would be met, the environment would be safe, there were people to trust and people who cared. Children needed to know they could take educational risks in an acceptable environment.

Critical thinking skills have not been a top priority in schools. Basic education has been at the forefront. Schools have been concerned about bringing up the achievement scores in reading and math. Orr and Klein (1991) believed children needed to learn to analyze situations. Questioning techniques should be enhanced.

Students would benefit from increased emphasis on learning to question and examine situations. Schools should nurture those characteristics. Educators have had a responsibility to incorporate critical thinking into the curriculum in order to promote a questioning spirit, a sense of fairness and a willingness to take educational risks.

In the project the writer implemented, both school climate and critical thinking skills were addressed and enhanced. A Pen Pal Project was designed. The Pen Pal Project had students writing to students in other classes and even other grade levels. The students perceived the idea as a fun activity and teachers were able to incorporate critical thinking skills into the letter writing. Children began to feel they knew someone else in the school. A sense of belonging developed. The writer envisioned the classes, that were writing to one another, as building such a rapport that the teachers would decide to work on other projects together. When the children felt good about writing to someone, about expressing ideas in a non-judgmental, non-threatening atmosphere, the enhanced good feeling carried over into other areas of the curriculum. The students felt as

though what they thought mattered and there was increased self-esteem. This increased self-esteem gave greater confidence and children were more inclined to be risk-takers in the educational setting.

CHAPTER III

Method

The writer presented the idea of building a sense of community within the school, at a faculty meeting. It was explained to teachers a 12 week implementation period would be required for the proposed Pen Pal Project. Each teacher and child would complete a pre-implementation survey to determine attitudes about the school. With the intention of uniting students in a common bond, children wrote letters to each other. In the letters the children expressed thoughts and feelings. Critical thinking skills were used by the teachers as they gave direction to the letter writing project. The students used critical thinking skills in the brainstorming techniques to decide what information would be of interest to the pen pal and what information would be of interest in the return letters. Questioning techniques were used both by teachers and students in determining the way to illicit the responses from others to gain knowledge. Proper responses were also discussed before and during the Pen Pal Project.

Teachers did not grade any portion of the letters. As a motivational tool, each class made a mailbox to put the pen pal letters in. At the end of the implementation period, a post-implementation survey was administered to determine the effectiveness of the project.

Teachers were given a week during which to respond to the idea presented. Those teachers that volunteered to participate decided upon another teacher and class with which to correspond. The classes involved in the project sent home a letter of intent to each parent This letter described the project and each child's projected involvement (Appendix C:72). Parents were asked to return the letter if they did not wish their child to participate. Only those students who returned letters were not allowed to participate in the survey. The surveys were given, collected and tabulated. The collected data was used in the problem statement. Each teacher kept a list of any returned letters. All students participated in the letter writing project as it was part of the curriculum.

The writer, at the beginning of the implementation, met with the project teachers. The responsibilities of the teachers for monitoring of the project were discussed

and given as follows:

1. Teachers kept a record of the children who could not participate in the pre and post implementation surveys.

2. Teachers kept a record of the number of letters written by each child (there was a minimum of six).

3. Pen Pal letters were written on computers and word processing units by as many children as class time permitted. Each teacher kept a record of the number of letters written.

4. The teachers had the individual classes participate in the making of a class mailbox. This was used as the motivator of the project and the collector of all letters to be sent to the corresponding class.

5. The teachers passed out, administered and collected both pre and post implementation climate surveys.

6. Each teacher completed a pre and post implementation climate survey.

7. Each teacher decided how the class names would be exchanged with the pen pal class.

8. Each teacher decided what time during the school day the letters were to be written. The teacher also decided if those letters were to be used as part of the school curriculum.

9. Teachers attended monthly meetings to discuss the progress of the program and any program concerns.

10. Teachers were instructed to keep samples of any letters that were felt to be

representative of the Pen Pal Project.

11. At the end of the project, a Teacher Supplemental Survey was given. Each teacher completed the survey which helped evaluate the program.

The resources required for teachers to implement the letter writing program included a box, construction paper, glue, scissors and crayons. Those materials turned a simple box into the classroom mailbox. The mailbox promoted cooperation within the class and strengthened bonds. Each child provided pencils and paper for the letters. Once names were exchanged, each child wrote the introductory letter and put it in the mailbox. The children wrote the letters while seated at the desks in the classroom. Each teacher determined when and provided the time that was necessary for the writing project in each class.

Most kindergarten children however, needed someone older to write the letters as the students dictated them. This required the teacher to find time during the day to individually write a letter with each student or pull older students from classes to come into the kindergarten classroom and work with a kindergarten students. Some of the kindergarten teachers worked cooperatively with fourth grade teachers. Fourth grade students who had

class time that could be used in conjunction with the kindergarten class time, came and wrote letters for the students as the students dictated. Each teacher provided the pencils and paper for this use.

It was the vision of the writer that all the students involved in the program would write at least one letter, out of the six required, on the computer. The children could have designed stationery on the computer and used other graphics if those capabilities were in the computer. Each class needed a computer and a printer.

Once all letters in the class were written, the mailboxes between the two classes were exchanged. Using the letter writing project, teachers were able to incorporate the skills needed for letter writing from the curriculum into this part of the day. The word processor was used in the project by students to write the pen pal letters. If the classroom had printing capabilities then the letters were printed out. Some students were able to print borders around the letters and made it personal stationery.

Monitoring of the Pen Pal Project was accomplished through teacher kept records. Those responsibilities have been listed. Monitoring of the project by the

writer was accomplished through several methods. Once a month, meetings were held with the teachers to discuss the program. Ways to include critical thinking skills were discussed. Concerns for the program and any innovative ideas were also addressed. The teachers were asked to keep samples of students' letters. Those samples, at intervals throughout the project, were given to the writer to examine and keep. At times during the implementation of the project, the older students who were involved in the project approached the writer. Those students stated how much each enjoyed completing the survey, writing the letters and getting to know another person in the school. A Teacher Supplemental Survey (Figure 1:54) was given at the end of the letter writing project. This assisted the writer in determining if some of the objectives of the program had been met.

The writer evaluated the pen pal writing program in several ways. One approach to the evaluation was accomplished through observation of enthusiasm. As the writer observed several classrooms in the process of letter writing, each showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the project. Also during the project, the writer was approached by intermediate students who voiced approval

Grade Level_____

1. Did all students participate in the letter writing campaign? yes____ no____

2. Did you have word processing capabilities for your class? yes____ no____

3. Did 80 percent of your students use the computer for one letter?
yes____ no____

4. Did you use critical thinking skills during the letter writing program?
yes____ no____

5. If you answered yes to question four, briefly describe how you incorporated critical thinking skills into the writing program.

Figure 1

Teacher Supplemental Survey

of the project. During the monthly meetings, with teachers of the project, the writer heard many positive comments about the project and the intention of the teachers to continue with the project the following year.

Kindergarten, first grade and second grade teachers expressed concern during the meetings about access to the computers. With only one computer per class, not all with printers and the length of time needed for this age

group to write letters, the writer discovered it required much more time for those students to participate. The teachers of the primary classes that used intermediate students as helpers in writing letters for the primary children used less class time. Evaluation of the project was also done by comparing the positive results of the pre and post-implementation surveys.

Each class wrote at least six letters over a 12 week period. At the end of the 12 week period a post-implementation survey was given to students and teachers to determine the impact of the project on school climate.

Timeline

Week One	Mailboxes were made by each class. Initial letters were written and sent. Teachers met and discussed the use of critical thinking skills.
Week Two-Four	The children continued to write letters using the critical thinking skills discussed earlier.
Week Five	Teachers met and discussed continued implementation of critical thinking skills. Students exchanged letters.
Weeks Six-Eight	The children continued to exchange letters and ideas.
Week Nine	The teachers met to discuss critical thinking skills.

Students exchanged letters.

Weeks 10-12

The students wrote letters to pen pals using critical thinking skills. At the end of the twelfth week, teachers administered the post-implementation survey to children. The teachers also completed a post-implementation survey. (Appendices D and E:75-77).

CHAPTER IV

Evaluation

The Pen Pal Project established by the writer was intended as a means of improving the school climate. The target elementary school had a transient population. When the writer began the project 315 students were involved as evidenced by the number of pre-implementation surveys returned to the writer. At the end of the project, 369 students returned the post-implementation surveys. Of the 369 students, 68 percent reported the writing project made a difference in the feelings about the school. Ninety percent enjoyed getting to know another person in the school. This knowledge alone gave the writer the assurance that the letter writing campaign was indeed a worthy endeavor upon the part of the teachers and students.

To determine the impact of the pen pal letter writing campaign on school climate, a post-implementation survey was given to students (Appendix D:75). Following a period of 12 weeks, 95 percent of the 315 target students were to report a positive sense of school

belonging as measured by 80 percent positive comments on the post-implementation survey. Because of the transient nature of the school's population, 369 students actually participated in the project and the survey. Three hundred fifty-one of those students should have reported 80 percent positive comments in order for the objective to have been met. Three hundred fifty-one students did not report positive comments. This objective was not met however, the post-implementation survey reported that 77 percent (284) of the total number of students responded with positive comments. The writer felt the influx of students into the school had an influence on the results of the survey. The writer also felt the expectations were set too high. Two-thirds of the students who responded to the survey reported the writing project made a difference in the feelings each child had about the school.

The second objective for the Pen Pal Project was to have 95 percent of the 19 teachers report that students had maintained or improved a positive sense of school belonging as measured by a teacher created post-implementation survey. This objective was met. Ninety-five percent of the teachers reported such positive input

from students. While the teachers and the writer communicated throughout the program, it became evident from the teachers' comments that the students were enjoying the writing project.

The third objective involved 100 percent participation by students. Each student was to write a minimum of six letters to a pen pal over a 12 week period. All participating students wrote the required six letters. The results were reported by teachers. The teachers also reported that the writing project fit in very easily with the school curriculum. The students enjoyed writing to other people and those students in grades three through five wrote more than the minimum six letters.

The fourth objective pertained to using the computer capabilities. It was the objective for 80 percent of the targeted students to write at least one letter using a computer and printer. Teachers' responses on the Teacher Supplemental Survey revealed the objective was not met. The classes involved in the project had one computer per class but not every class had a printer. When the writer met with the teachers, at one of the monthly meetings, attention was focused on the younger students in grades

kindergarten through two. Even if each classroom had the capabilities necessary to produce hard copies of each letter, those primary students were not skilled enough in the writing process to have the class time to successfully use the computer. Those students did not use the computer for letters. Some students who showed the initiative and had the computer capabilities, made borders for the letters which served as a way to make personal stationery. Two of the fourth grade classes, who had kindergarten students as pen pals, helped the kindergarten students use the fourth grade computers and printers to write the pen pal letters. This was another way the project helped students get to know others. Even though the objective was not met, the writer felt the available computers and printers in the classrooms were used more fully.

As the writer evaluated the results of the Pen Pal Project, attention was directed to the sample letters (Appendix F:79) received from the students. These showed the various mediums and materials used by the students for the letter writing process. Some students used lined paper with pencils while others used the computer. Copies of decorated paper from Carson Dellosa were also

utilized. While reading the samples, the writer sensed a positive tone in the letters. As the writer continued to evaluate the results of the Pen Pal Project, attention was directed to the comparison results of the pre and post-implementation surveys. As shown by Table 1, every question had a positive increase of six to 13 percentage points. The writer felt this was significant and gave support to the Pen Pal Project as a successful means of improving school climate and worthy of being continued next year.

Table 1

Pre and Post Implementation Survey Results
On Positive Comments

QN	Pre	Post	Inc
1.	83	91	8
2.	66	79	13
3.	89	95	6
4.	63	79	13
5.	74	81	7
6.	63	74	11
7.	73	85	12
8.	84	91	7
9.	82	89	7
10.	76	83	12
11.	59	67	8
12.	56	68	12

QN - Question Number On Survey
Pre - Pre-Implementation Survey Results
Post - Post-Implementation Survey Results
Inc - Increase Of Percentage Points

Throughout the 12 week implementation period for the Pen Pal Project, the writer received mostly positive comments about the program. The teachers were impressed with the simplicity of the project and the enthusiasm demonstrated by the students during the time set aside for writing. Self-esteem was enhanced by having another person to communicate with and realizing each letter was looked upon with anticipation. Intermediate students bolstered self-esteem by helping younger students write letters. Enhanced student self-esteem resulted in a classroom climate of greater acceptance of ideas. The overall results of the post-implementation survey showed positive increases on every question. This suggested to the writer that the writing project did indeed have a positive impact on the participating students. Because of the simplicity of the project, implementation could be accomplished in any school at any time of the year. This project was a successful, worthwhile endeavor by all who participated.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

Upon the completion of the 12 week implementation period, teachers were encouraged to continue the pen pal writing. The writer shared the results of the surveys with the administration and the target school communication team. The writer, a member of the Kindergarten Association and on the board of Association For Childhood Education International (A.C.E.I.), shared the results of the project with those associations. The possibility of presenting the information to other schools on a county wide basis was discussed with the school administration. The writer pre-arranged with one of the teachers that implemented the program, to talk to the staff at a faculty meeting. That person discussed the program from the teacher point of view. The writer then informed the faculty of the survey results. Because of the overall success of the program, the writer has planned to encourage other teachers at the target school to resume or begin the Pen Pal Project.

The primary teachers have recommended exchanging

letters with children from the intermediate classes. The primary classes would then enlist the help of the intermediate children when the time came for letter writing or using the computer for letters. The older children could write what the younger children dictated.

The children certainly enjoyed using the computers instead of pencils and paper. Computers however, were not necessary tools. For those children just beginning to write, the experience of writing on paper individually was a rewarding experience. The lack of computers should not discourage active participation in the project.

Some teachers who participated in the project felt having the art teacher use a class period, instead of the classroom teacher, to make the mailbox for the project would be preferable. This thought had also occurred to the writer. It should be a consideration for the next year or if the project were to be used at a different school.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Pre-Implementation Student Climate Survey

Appendix A

Pre-Implementation Survey

Student Climate Survey

		Circle One
1.	I feel good about my school.	Yes No Uncertain
2.	It is easy to learn at my school.	Yes No Uncertain
3.	My teachers care if I learn.	Yes No Uncertain
4.	I like to go to school each day.	Yes No Uncertain
5.	My teacher lets me talk about my ideas.	Yes No Uncertain
6.	I find it easy to talk to my classmates.	Yes No Uncertain
7.	I find it easy to talk with my friends.	Yes No Uncertain
8.	My teachers care about me.	Yes No Uncertain
9.	When I have problems, I know I have someone to talk with at school.	Yes No Uncertain
10.	I find it easy to make friends.	Yes No Uncertain
11.	My favorite person to talk to at school is my teacher.	Yes No Uncertain
12.	My favorite person to talk with at school is a classmate.	Yes No Uncertain
13.	I walk or bike to school.	Yes No
14.	I ride in a car to school.	Yes No
15.	I ride a bus to school.	Yes No

Appendix B

Pre-Implementation Teacher Climate Survey

Appendix B

Pre-Implementation Survey

Teacher Climate Survey

		Circle One
1.	There is a lack of parental interest from families in your school.	Yes No Uncertain
2.	Students show an interest in school.	Yes No Uncertain
3.	Time is available for students to interact with each other in a positive way.	Yes No Uncertain
4.	Students feel at ease communicating with one another.	Yes No Uncertain
5.	I have time to include critical thinking skills in my curriculum.	Yes No Uncertain
6.	I sense an uneasiness in the classroom atmosphere.	Yes No Uncertain
7.	My students enjoy writing activities.	Yes No Uncertain
8.	Students look forward to coming to school each day.	Yes No Uncertain
9.	Students feel good about their school.	Yes No Uncertain

Appendix C

Letter of Intent to Parents

Appendix C

Letter of Intent to Parents

Dear Parents,

As a prerequisite to the completion of my Master's Degree, I am required to implement a 12 week program. This program is to be one that will benefit the school. I chose to address the idea of building a community feeling within the school. Our student population is a diverse group of individuals. It is my intention to unite the students in their feelings about the school environment.

Those children participating in this program will answer a short survey to first determine their attitudes about school. During a 12 week period, the students will write letters to other students, sharing their ideas. At the end of the 12 weeks, the students will once again complete a survey. A comparison will be made with a post implementation survey to determine if the weeks of sharing letters and ideas helped to make students' attitudes about school positive. You are also being asked for permission for your child's results to be included in group data in the final research report. No names will be included. If you do not wish for the child

to participate in the surveys, please fill out the form below and return it to your child's teacher by Tuesday, December 18, 1991. Thank you for your cooperation.

Mrs. Garrett

My child, _____, may not participate in the student survey that addresses the issue of the school environment.

_____
Parent/Guardian

Appendix D

Post-Implementation Student Climate Survey

Appendix D

Post-Implementation Survey

Student Climate Survey

		Circle One
1.	I feel good about my school.	Yes No Uncertain
2.	It is easy to learn at my school.	Yes No Uncertain
3.	My teachers care if I learn.	Yes No Uncertain
4.	I like to go to school each day.	Yes No Uncertain
5.	My teacher lets me talk about my ideas.	Yes No Uncertain
6.	I find it easy to talk to my classmates.	Yes No Uncertain
7.	I find it easy to talk with my friends.	Yes No Uncertain
8.	My teachers care about me.	Yes No Uncertain
9.	When I have problems, I know I have someone to talk with at school.	Yes No Uncertain
10.	I find it easy to make friends	Yes No Uncertain
11.	My favorite person to talk to at school is my teacher.	Yes No Uncertain
12.	My favorite person to talk with at school is a classmate.	Yes No Uncertain
13.	The writing project made a difference in my feelings about school.	Yes No Uncertain
14.	I enjoyed getting to know another person in my school.	Yes No Uncertain

Appendix E

Post-Implementation Teacher Climate Survey

Appendix E

Post-Implementation Survey

Teacher Climate Survey

		Circle One
1.	There is a lack of parental interest from families in your school.	Yes No Uncertain
2.	Students show an interest in school.	Yes No Uncertain
3.	Time is available for students to interact with each other in a positive way.	Yes No Uncertain
4.	Students feel at ease communicating with one another.	Yes No Uncertain
5.	I have time to include critical thinking skills in my curriculum.	Yes No Uncertain
6.	I sense an uneasiness in the classroom atmosphere.	Yes No Uncertain
7.	My students enjoy writing activities.	Yes No Uncertain
8.	Students look forward to coming to school each day.	Yes No Uncertain
9.	Students feel good about their school.	Yes No Uncertain
10.	Students seemed to enjoy writing to other students in the school.	Yes No Uncertain
11.	Students enjoyed learning about other students in the school.	Yes No Uncertain

Appendix F

Sample Students Letters

Appendix F

Sample Student Letters

Dear Ronald, MY NAME
is David LaTON
MY FAVoRiTE THiNG
IS To ENTR MY
ENT
FISH IN.THe
FLoRiDA. STATE. FAIR

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81

ONE

LAST YEAR 1ST PLACE
IN THE FLORIDA
STATE FAIR YOUR FRIEND
DAVID

Dear Kanique,
My Name is MUrtin
RinGHIESIN.
My fAVORite
THING IS To PLOY!
KARATA. I HAVe 3 PETS 1 IS
A DOG 1 IS A CAT 1 IS A KITTN

83

I Hve 2 SISTERS 1 OF MY SISTERS NAME IS DAWN AND MY OTHR SISTERS NAME IS CAILIN.

YOUR FRIEND,

MARTY

84

Dear Nick caluch

My favorit shoe is Blacktops I like the movie chuckie Im going to another Class Im six years Old I like to go to MCdonld and Burgerking I like to play Foot ball And Succer I like salad from

I like to write bickyle it's a ten speed My sister has a four speed. the end

from
A.J.

Dear, Bama

Thank you for writting a letter Back to me. I like waffles, Samdwich, pizza My favorite Kind of Shoe is ReeBox I like the Ghost Busters, Batman I like Super mario Bros. I am 6 years old I look like E.T. turn over →

My favorite Color is Blue.
My Best friend is Chris Green
I think my teacher is nice
My favorite snack is snickers
Bars I want to live in New
York. I like camping. If I had
a wish I'd want to be filthy rich

from
Chris. Q.

88

Dear Ariel Part.

My eye is all black. (I love it.
Thank you for the letter. You're my
and nice. I'm 7 years old and my
birthday is January 18. My favorite color is
Uncle Daniel's. I like the Enchanted
Castle, and only two.

Love,
Travis

100

101

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Dear
Travis,

My name is Nick. I'm 9.
My birthday is May 24th. I was born in New-
York hospital. I was born in 1983. My favorite show
is Tiny Toon's. My other favorite show is Full house.

from, Nick.

Dear Doug,

I was born in florida.
I used to play sqcal
but the seasen ended.
Next year I'm going to
play base ball. my favorit
sports base ball. And my
favorit parishion is picter or
short stop. What is your
favorit sport?

your pen pal,
Matt B.

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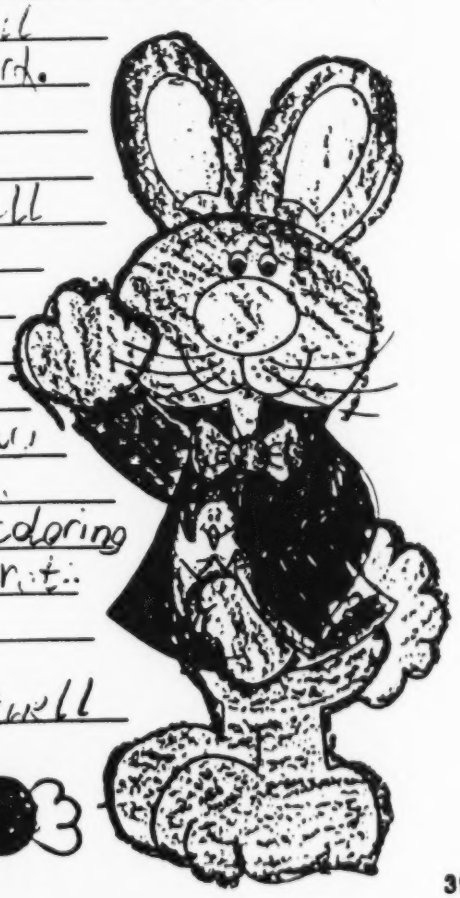
91

Dear Nick,
My favorite basketball team is the Chigago Bulls and my favorite player is Micheal Jordan. My second favorite team is the Los Angele Lakers and my second favorite player is Magic Johnson I have Dan Marino and other football player's rookie card.

Love,
Tommy Boswell

P.S. sorry about this picture I had to go this small in order to finish coloring part of the carrot.

Name Tommy Boswell



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